# WHIRRAKEE

March 2012

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BENDIGO

FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

## Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Address for correspondence: PO Box 396, Bendigo 3552. Web address: www.BendigoFNC.com.au
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### Office Bearers for 2011 - 2012

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| President | Jan Orr | 5443 5668 |
| Senior Vice President | Matthew Comer | 0409 162627 |
| Junior Vice President | *position vacant* | |
| Secretary | Stuart Fraser | 5443 1326 |
| Minute Secretary | Anne Bridley | |
| Treasurer | Ben Goonan | |
| Membership Officer | Anne Bridley | 5442 6188 |
| Excursion organiser | *position vacant* | |
| Syllabus organiser | Ben Goonan | |
| Librarian | Diana Collier (an assistant is still required) | 5443 0137 |
| Garden Convenor/Secretary | Matthew Comer | 0409 162 627 |
| Hall Management | Maurie Lewis (assisted by Rob Moors) | 0407 427179 |
| *Whirrakee* contact | Sabine Wilkens e-mail: s.wilkens@latrobe.edu.au | 5443 2797 |
| *Whirrakee* mailing coordinator | Rod Orr | 5443 5668 |

**Membership** of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is open to all those interested in Natural History. The subscription rates are: Single $34; Family $40; Concession: Single $28.50; Family $34. *Whirrakee* subscription only is $34.

**General meetings** are held on the second Wednesday of each month. The venue for General meetings is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square. The meeting starts with a 10 minute thing-of-the night natural history segment. The invited speaker starts at 8:00pm and meetings conclude with supper. The Annual Meeting is held in September.

**Committee meetings** are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 6:00pm. Members of the Committee are the Office Bearer listed above and the following members: Anne Bridley, Glenise Moors, Joy Clusker, Kerrie Norris, John Lindner.

**Excursions** are conducted regularly and are advertised on the diary page of the *Whirrakee*. The assembly point for excursions is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, unless otherwise specified. Several interclub field naturalist campouts are held every year.

The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club has one sub-group (the Fauna Study Group) and is actively involved in local conservation issues. An **indigenous garden** has been established around the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building. Working bees are advertised on the *Whirrakee* diary page.

**Fauna Study Group**: Chairman: John Burtonclay, Fadersons Lane, Mandurang (5439 5710)
Secretary: Bill Holsworth, 13 Nabilla Crs., Bendigo (5443 4063)
Equipment Officer: Maurie Lewis (0407 427179)
Regular fauna excursions take place most Fridays. See page 11 for details.

**Bird Observing:** Club members conduct regular bird surveys. Please contact Anne Bridley 5442 6188 or Glenise Moors 5439 6254 for details. Special bird observations should be reported to Anne Bridley 5442 6188.
To propose bird observing excursions please contact Kerrie Norris 5447 8017.

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Front cover photo?...see page 2

# WHIRRAKEE

Monthly Newsletter of the Bendigo Field Naturalist Club

Vol. 33, No. 2, March 2012

*Whirrakee* takes its name from the Whirrakee Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*) which is virtually endemic to the Bendigo region

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Authors are responsible for the accuracy of the information they use and also for any opinions expressed in their articles. Contributions will be included as soon as possible after they are received, although articles received more than one week after the monthly General Meeting will probably be too late for inclusion in the next issue of *Whirrakee*.
Articles in *Whirrakee* may be reproduced, but permission should be obtained from the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, and acknowledgment should be given to the author and the Club. Some back issues are still available on request.

*Editor's Note*
*I wonder if anybody ever reads the* Whirrakee. *There are usually a few questions posed by readers, but other than one member, there is never a response to these. Some of these are interesting questions, that I would really like answered! There are a few in this edition, so this will be a test. If you know the answer(s), why not send an e-mail? It would be so nice if we could have more of a discussion between our readership. More answers will encourage more questions, and we'll all win.*

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**Front page photographer:** Tamara Marwood
The family Nature Club outing for February was about nature photography. With Anthony Sheean sharing some outdoor photographic tips and hints, participants took close-up photos and also landscape shots. For some more photos of this event, see page 6.

## Short Notices

### SEANA March Camp

You are invited to the SEANA March Camp at Camperdown, hosted by the Timboon Field Naturalists Club 16- 17- 18- 19 March 2012.

Autumn, in the western district, includes magnificent vistas, spectacular volcanic forms and wetlands full of birds, we hope. The camp is based at Camperdown among the lakes and craters of the western district.
Excursions are planned to visit Lake Toolirook and Mt. Elephant to the north, guided tour of Mt. Shadwell quarry, plus sites including Mt. Noorat to the west, Red Rock and Lake Corangamite in the east. Explore volcanic formations, Ramsar Lakes, Stoney Rises, fresh and saline wetlands, birds, remnant vegetation and Camperdown's, Mt. Leura, Lakes Gnotuck and Bullen Merri.
Saturday and Sunday Dinner, Speakers and meeting will be at the Camperdown Golf Club. Lake Gnotuck.

Please arrange your own accommodation. Camperdown has a range including caravan park, hotels , motels and B&Bs. other areas Lake Purrumbete s/c cottages and caravan park 10 km east. Cobden 14km south or Terang 22km to the west.
*Contact Sabine Wilkens for the page with accommodation suggestions (incl. prices).*
*The booking form was in the last Whirrakee.*

### Upcoming SEANA Camp in Bendigo

*17 - 20 August.* We will need considerable support from members for all sorts of activities. Watch this space…

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### Notes and Observations from the February General Meeting

assembled by Rod Orr

*Indian Mynahs*
Bernard Cannon gave a short presentation on the Indian Miner problem in Bendigo. Is there any interest in forming a group to investigate their control? Please contact Bernard if interested on 5441 6680.

Here we are, already racing into another year…time to get organised in the garden!

**Garden Working Bee**
**Saturday 10th March, 9am**

It will be an easy morning, just doing general maintenance, including weeding, pruning, sweeping and tidying. All welcome

*Landscape Reference Group*
Rod Orr is the club's representative on this newly formed group that recognizes unique landscapes in our region. He has requested from members details of any issues to bring to this group.

### Observations

*Anne Speechley* - Powerful Owl heard calling in the early morning (3 am) - Junortoun side of Strathfieldsaye (Saturday 4th Feb.).

*Bill Holsworth* - asked about the frequency of occurrence of Sulphur-crested Cockatoos in the Kennington/Strathdale area. He has heard them recently. Most responses were to the effect that Long-billed Corellas were much more common in this area at the present time, often seen feeding on the sports ovals early in the morning together with flocks of Galahs.

*Kerrie Norris* - reported seeing a Tuan (Brush-tailed Phascogale) in broad daylight (2 pm, late in December 2011) in an Ironbark several metres above a nest box. It was a warm, sunny, still day.

*Joy Clusker* - has had 6 - 10 Fruit Bats visiting a Nectarine tree every night for the last 3 - 4 weeks in Strathfieldsaye.

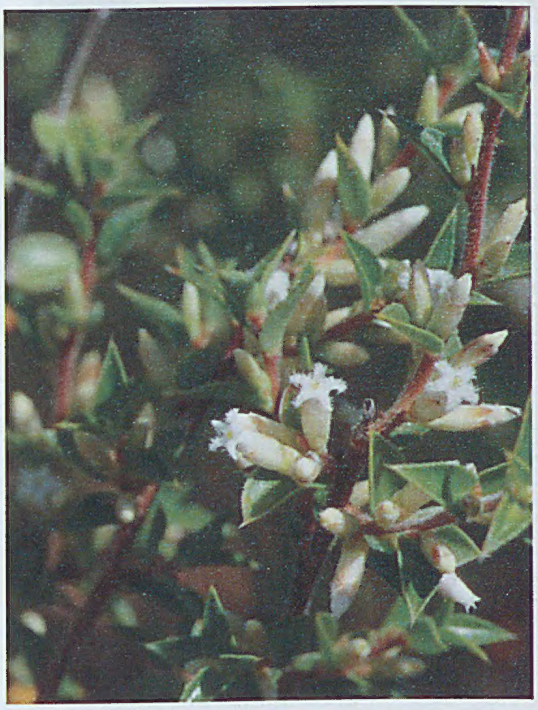
*Margaret Kane* - has a Superb Blue Wren with about 4 brown wrens in her back garden - never seen before in the 20 years she has lived at that house. They were also there on the next day. Margaret also asked whether Ants don't like Apricots when they are on the ground as she has not seen any in or on them.

continued on page 8…

**Late Summer flowers** **Photographer: Rod Orr**

These photos just didn't make it into the FebruaryWhirrakee but they really belong to that late summer period of January/February, so imagine yourself a month back in time, wandering through the bush....

*Leucopogon rufus* (Ruddy Beard-heath)

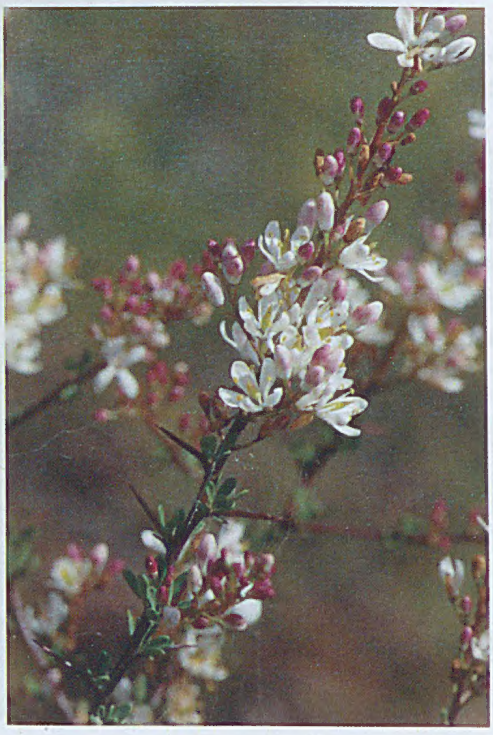


This species flowers during November and December and is best seen in the Kamarooka section of the Greater Bendigo N.P.

The very attractive seed heads of Golden Pennants (*Glischrocaryon behrii*)

Broombush (*Melaleuca uncinata*) ↓

*Bursaria spinosa* (Sweet Bursaria), its seed-pods are now the most noticeable feature of this spiny plant. ➔ One of its Common Names, Native Black-thorn, celebrates its sharp spines. Stuart Fraser claims that its sweetly perfumed flowers produce a pale green honey.



↑ An often-overlooked local plants because it flowers during Summer. During Autumn and Winter, larger specimens are surrounded by their fruit which falls when it is ripe. It's supposed to be edible but the fruit is mostly just a very shallow layer of flesh around a large, hard seed. Geebung or Rough Persoonia, *Persoonia rigida*

↑ *Melaleuca decussata* (Totem Poles) flowers during late Spring and Summer, generally along drainage lines and in low-lying areas of our surrounding bushland

*Eriophora heroine* (Heroic Orb-weaver) ➔
(see story on page 8)

A while ago, Joy Clusker set our readers a puzzle by asking about the orange 'blob' below. Several Nature Club members noticed it again during the February excursion and Rod Orr 'supersleuth' worked out its identity. It is a giant (female) coccid, *Monophlebulus* sp., which probably feeds on eucalypts. Another puzzle solved! ➔

The **Family Nature Club in February was about nature photography**
Photos by Tamara Marwood from http://bendigofamilynatureclub.blogspot.com.au/

With cameras and smart phones the participants enjoyed an hour of snapping. We have invited all participants to email through up to 3 of their favourite images to us to post on our blog page and Face Book site.

However, photography isn't the only way to document what we find in the bush! Some Nature Club goers also took to pencil and paper. See Tamara's website for some of the beautiful pictures of these artists.

**From Dale Little's garden**... 'Katydids have returned to our garden! I noticed two small ones, approximately two centimetres in length, near some dead leaves caught in our thryptomene bush. Further close searching revealed another small katydid and a large one. For many months last year we had up to seven katydids on the bush.'

'I also noticed this small casing, again, approximately two centimetres in length, and wondered whether there was a connection. The casing is beautifully made and is quite soft. Perhaps some of the members may be able to answer this for me' ➔

Jan and Rod spotted this lace monitor along Camp Road in the Kamarooka ➓

February Observations continued…

*Jane Cleary* - asked: 'Why do Bullants move house every few years?' Their nest, before they move, becomes quite extensive with masses of clay brought up from what must be an extensive system of underground passages. She has had Bullant nests in the garden for over 25 years. They have recently set up a new nest after moving approximately 5 metres from the old nest.

*Eric Wilkinson* – talked about Purple-crowned Lorikeets at California Gully.
'On the afternoon of Friday 3rd February, I heard unfamiliar parrot calls from our Lemon-scented Gum. I was not able to get a clear view of the birds, as they remained partly hidden in the upper foliage, but thought they were most likely lorikeets of some kind, but knew they were not Musk Lorikeets. I considered Rainbow Lorikeets, which do come to our garden occasionally, but I did not think the calls were right for them.

I did not have to wait long for an answer, as around 10 am the next morning I was looking out our kitchen window at Silvereyes at our bird bath in the back garden, when they were joined by two lorikeets. I got clear views of the distinctive lorikeet outline, as they clambered down through the shrubbery towards the bird bath. I noted that they were a darker green than the bright green of a Musk Lorikeet, and the facial markings were different. Even the fact that they were coming down to drink was different. Musk Lorikeets normally show no interest in our bird bath, except on days of really extreme heat, and this was a mild morning. They were very obliging, as they perched facing towards me in bright sunlight, and as they dipped their heads towards the water I could see through my binoculars the bright purple patches on the tops of their heads. This was quite exciting as it would be more than 20 years since the last time we had Purple-crowned Lorikeets in our garden. I have heard them each day since Saturday, although their visits are brief, and I have not yet managed another clear sighting.'

*Glenise Moors* reported on the success of the Portland 7-14 Uniting Church Camp, Nature Photography Camp. Seaweeds, Gannets, light house tour, Whites Beach - Beetle pupae? Glenelg River,Princess Margaret Rose Caves, Cobobbonee NP, some interesting birds, Port McDonnell 'forest', observations & slide evenings.

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**Heroic spider in the Orr's cactus**

by Rod Orr

A few weeks ago Jan decided that it was time to re-pot some of the cactus plants in our garden. I helped with some of the larger ones and was surprised to see a spiny patch move slightly when I picked this cactus up - very carefully!
The photo on page 5 shows it magnified ~3 to 4X, so it is a lot more obvious in the image than when I first saw it. I also turned the plant around so that the spider was brightly illuminated, so it was no longer being allowed to hide on the shady side.
It's almost as spiny as the cactus at this magnification, isn't it?
Understandably, the spider was very reluctant to move away from such good protective cover but, eventually, it did build a new web connected to the tree near where I'd moved the repotted cactus and it's since moved on to some other part of the garden.
The characteristic 3 pointed knobs on the abdomen are quite a prominent feature of this spider but I was also very impressed by the way its colour and pattern blended in with its chosen cactus. It kept its head down and didn't move, confident that it was invisible, no doubt (perhaps just like a little child, because it couldn't see me, therefore I couldn't see it).

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**February General Meeting – John Arnott 'Where horticulture meets ecology'**

by Sabine Wilkens

The Royal Botanic Gardens Cranbourne is where this meeting between horticulture and ecology happens, and John Arnott, the Manager (Horticulture) has been instrumental

in making it happen. Rising from a sea of agriculture, 43 km from the CBD Melbourne, is the biggest remnant patch of local indigenous vegetation, which was to become the Cranbourne Botanic Gardens. The site (an old sand dune system, which due to its low agricultural productivity was never developed for pasture), was selected in 1969, and purchased in 1970. Today 65 000 visitors per annum enjoy free entry to this magnificent garden. Today, this area has a high conservation value and is a high biodiversity zone. There are 250 ha of indigenous vegetation, the largest remnant of this vegetation type in existence and it is in very good condition too. As a result, the Botanic Gardens are not only a haven for plants, but also for much native wildlife, which is being cared for like in few other places in Australia.
10% of the Victorian Flora are represented in this garden (approximately 360 out of 3400 species), including 22 of the 28 genera of Victorian orchids. But, being native does not mean being good, as the biggest weed issue in the conservation zone are native weeds that, at some stage or another, have been accidentally introduced or deliberately planted. So, any new species have to undergo rigorous selection and screening by experts, before they are allowed to be part of the plantings.

The fungi on the site are equally interesting with a whole new genus being discovered recently. Also calling this area their home are 25 species of native mammals, 200 bird species and 20 different reptiles. Native animals are protected by a fence that surrounds the entire site and much active pest control is practiced by the numerous staff on site. For example, control programs for foxes and Indian Mynahs are currently in place.

Fire on the Cranbourne site is controlled mostly for ecological purposes (although some asset protection burns are also carried out) and a patchiness of burning (pyrodiversity) is maintained to simulate pre-european conditions. The southern brown bandicoot is one of the beneficiaries of such patchiness as it needs both recently burnt and unburnt areas to thrive.

Stage 1 of the garden has been completed and was opened in 2000. The brief for this was to display native Australian plants in creative ways, to celebrate the role of these plants in Australian life and culture and to educate visitors about the care and maintenance of a native garden. This education aspect is especially valuable as the suburbs around the gardens are undergoing rapid development. Many examples of 'different' and imaginative backyard gardens will potentially inspire local visitors, who are about to embark on their own bit of landscaping around their newly built houses. In the stage 1 area, many types of environments are represented including saltbush country, dry river beds, rock pool waterways and the breathtaking ephemeral lake sculpture (which alone has inspired me to go and visit the place). There are also diversity plots, cultivated gardens and an array of research plots, which showcase the horticultural research to the local community.

Stage 2, which will complete the garden (possibly even this year), will have a tidal river inspired river walk, 'vertical plots' to showcase Australia's climbing plants, succulents, a eucalypt walk and a 'weird and wonderful' garden, which will have many unusual plants in it as well as a Gondwanan garden and the artistically inspired '*Melaleuca* Spits'.

Sadly, the gardens, (before they are even finished) are threatened, not only by weedy plants and feral animals, but also by a relatively new plant disease called myrtle rust (*Uredo rangelii*), that has recently been spotted in Victoria. This fungus causes characteristic spots on the leaves of Mytaceae plants. These eventually break out into pustules with loads of bright yellow spores and ultimately causes twisted and deformed growth and death of affected plants A very large percentage of the garden plants are in the family Myrtaceae, so extremely vigilance is practiced by the entire garden staff who is hoping to spot any symptom in produce and/or vegetations nearby, long before it enters the garden precinct.

**Cane Toads and Australian Geographic Scientific Expedition, May 2011**

by Sabine Wilkens

*The Australian Geographic Society (AGS) hosted a scientific expedition base camp within the Kimberleys to better understand the area's wildlife before the imminent arrival of cane toads. The 'hands-on' team of scientists and conservation volunteers recorded a multitude of rarely seen fauna including, birds, reptiles, butterflies and fish.*

This talk, advertised by the above summary, was a fascinating account of a Bendigo volunteer, Tony Spurling, who had no background in wildlife studies or conservation, yet felt he wanted to give something back after he retired about 5 years ago (from what he called a desk-jockey type job). When the Bendigo Advertiser called for volunteers, Tony grabbed the opportunity and applied. The idea of the (10 day) expedition was to establish a baseline or benchmark of selected and/or threatened fauna groups in the Kimberleys before the arrival of the cane toad. Its arrival is predicted sometime this year.

The cane toad a native to Venezuela, has many attributes that make is a perfect pest species, like being a prolific breeder, an opportunistic feeder, and, unusually amongst toads, it feeds on dead and living things. It only needs water to breed and has a life expectancy of 10 -15 years in the wild. It can tolerate salt water up to 15% and thrives around human habitation. Eggs, laid in strings, number about 15000 per string.

The cane toad's march westward has been much quicker than its northward migration; it has crossed the WA border some time ago and is now found around the Ord River dam.

All up there were 12 volunteers and 11 scientists, with each scientist specialising in a particular group of fauna. The base camp was at the El Quaestro station caravan park.

It is unknown what animal groups will be most affected by the arrival of the cane toad, but obvious groups are those that feed on cane toad prey, and more importantly perhaps, those that feed on eggs, tadpoles and possibly the adult toads themselves.

Goannas are predicted to be one of the most severely affected groups. They feed on frogs, fish, snakes carrion and eggs. Ten species were found. The cane toad will destroy the food stock of these goannas and some are big enough to eat the toad itself,

Frogs are the favourite food of cane toads who eat all life stages. During the expedition, behavioural studies were conducted on how long certain frogs spend on the ground (thus in the danger zone) as opposed to up in the canopy.

Frog eggs and tadpoles are the favourite food of turtles, and it is likely that they will attempt to eat these life stages of the cane toad and die from the poison. Even the freshwater crocodile with its diet of fish and frogs is therefore threatened. Snakes also love frogs and will go for cane toads. These are so poisonous that the snake often dies before even finishing the toad. Some fish species are also threatened because they might eat eggs and tadpoles of cane toads. With groups like birds or butterflies it is quite unknown what effect the cane toad will have. Many species were catalogued on the expedition. To a large extent it is diet that determines an immediate threat to fauna, although some birds seem to have made behavioural changes to cope with the poison of cane toads.

Tony's talk was fascinating, but the overall message was less positive...

So far, no control measures have been found and the toad seems unstoppable in its advance. The Australian Geographic Expedition will again be mounted in 2012, to check for initial effects of the invasion. Volunteers are needed again. For more detail, see http://www.australiangeographic.com.au/society/ag-society-scientific-expedition.htm

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**How long is a meat ant trail?**

Recently I had a question put to me whether a 100m long meat ant trail is unusual.

Does anybody know how long such trails get?

## Diary

All Club meetings are held at the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High St Golden Square, unless otherwise indicated.

**Wednesday, March 14** **7.30pm**
The speaker in March is Dr Libby Rumpff, School of Botany, University of Melbourne. Her topic is 'Evaluating woodland restoration strategies'.

**Wednesday, April 11** **7.30pm**
Dr John Morgan, Plant Ecology Lab & Research Centre for Applied Alpine Ecology, Department of Botany, La Trobe University will talk about "The 'Inch Flora':morphology, seed biology and ecology of annual plant species of the semi-arid woodlands and grass-lands of Victoria"

**Wednesday, May 9** **7.30pm**
Attilla Kapitany, Australian Succulent Plants, "Australian and local succulent plants"

**Wednesday June 13** **7.30pm**
David Stewart, Entomological Society of Victoria: "Observations from Mt Korong"

## Regular Fauna Excursions

Every Friday morning starting at around 9 to 9:30 the Fauna Group inspects nest boxes in the Spring Gully area. The excursions are led by Maurie Lewis, 16 Vains St. Golden Square. Phone 0407 427 179. Phone Maurie to confirm exact departure times and location. If you don't phone and go directly to Maurie's house and find nobody at the house between 9 and 9:30, then the excursion is not on.

Important...**Garden Working Bee**, Saturday 10th March, 9am. See page 3 for more details

## SEANA March Camp at Camperdown.

For details see page 3.

## Family Nature Club

'Fossils in the Forest - Bendigo's Prehistoric Past'. Phil Dyson will show the Family Nature Club how to find and identify fossils at a secret location near One Tree Hill. People who want to come must register by phone with Stuart or by email with Tam before we will disclose the meeting place. Starting time is 10 am on Sunday March 18 - please try to arrive early so that we are able to start on time. We really appreciate the support and interest from our BFNC members who have supported these activities by acting a guides and helpers. This time we really do need support because we expect considerable interest and a 'Full House' of participants. Children will be able to take their best 'Fossil finds' home with them - Phil has been given special permission for this.
Check out their 2011 and 2012 activities at http://bendigofamilynatureclub.blogspot.com/

**Registration:**
Bendigonatureclub@gmail.com or 5443-1326

## Wildlife Rescue & Information Network Inc.

W.R.I.N. is an organisation dedicated to the care of orphaned, sick or injured native animals. It is fully endorsed by the Dept of Sustainability and Environment.
Please call our Emergency Number for Help for Fauna in Need. Phone: 0419 356433.

## Owls of the forest

Saturday 19th May, 1.30 - 2.30pm

This presentation will be on three nocturnal species - Tawny frogmouth, Southern boobook and Australian owlet-nightjar. Our guest speaker is Marian Weaving who is a PhD Candidate on the Tawny Frogmouth Project from the School of Life and Environmental Sciences at Deakin University.

**Where:** Trentham Neighbourhood Centre, High St, Trentham. **Cost:** Gold coin donation on the night. **Bookings:** Trentham Neighbourhood Centre (03) 5424 1354 Email trentham@ourneighbourhood.org.au